

The Breakfast Club

by UA

Category: Walking Dead

Genre: Family, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Carol, Daryl D.

Pairings: Carol/Daryl D.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-14 07:32:51

Updated: 2016-04-23 22:06:51

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:16:37

Rating: M

Chapters: 5

Words: 8,814

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: She seemed to melt a little more with each knuckle that he kissed, opening her fingers like an unfurling flower, and by the time his mouth caressed her palm, one pale leg had risen to slink over his hip and the heat of her settled over the small of his back. "I been lookin', Sweetheart. You just ain't been payin' attention..."

1. Chapter 1

****The Breakfast Club****

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><p>The distant bleat of an alarm made Daryl groan, and he pulled his pillow over his head with both hands, muttering a muffled curse into the mattress and burrowing deeper into the warm cocoon of blankets and silky, sweet-smelling skin draped carelessly across his back. His smothered swearing grew more distinct when the dog started barking in some kind of off-tempo chorus with the clock, and he stuck out a hand blindly, crab-walking it across the bed to seize and silence the damned thing. "I said shut the hell up!"<p>

The dog obeyed for about a second before resuming making a general nuisance of itself, whining and thumping its tail hopefully against a hardwood floor strewn with last night's clothes.

When Daryl eased the pillow off his head and cracked one bleary blue eye open to spy the mutt staring at him with big fuckin' heart eyes and its leather leash held gently between its teeth, he growled. "Naw. Ain't fallin' for that innocent shit again. Go find you a new

sucker." A giggle floated to his ears then, an auburn curl slithered across his shoulder to kiss his cheek, and the shadow of her sunny smile against his shoulder blade stirred his blood more hotly than the soft press of her breasts into the sway of his back.

"Milton's going to be so disappointed."

"'Bout what?" Daryl threaded his fingers through the hand she offered him, absently nuzzled the bend of her elbow. "Me finally gettin' you to walk up them stairs with me?"

She laughed, all silver sass, and squeezed his hand, the butterfly tickle of her lashes against his nape sending a shiver skating up and down his spine as she settled (even) more comfortably against his solid form. "Finally? What do you mean finally? Before last night you barely gave me a second look. Least not that way."

Daryl snorted into the sheets and shook his head. "Hear that, Hades?"

The dog, who'd slumped to the floor in lazy resignation and made a bed of his abandoned pants, lifted its head and whined again, a tiny flicker of hope sparking in its icy blue gaze.

"Somebody needs her eyes checked." Hades barked in seeming agreement, and Daryl grinned when she huffed quietly in annoyance, tightening his hold on her hand when she tried to pull it away and bringing it to his lips. She seemed to melt a little more with each knuckle that he kissed, opening her fingers like an unfurling flower, and by the time his mouth caressed her palm, one pale leg had risen to slink over his hip and the heat of her settled over the small of his back. "I been lookin', Sweetheart. You just ain't been payin' attention for shit."

Her lips curled into a smile between his shoulder blades, and the fingers of the hand not held hostage by his own carded through the dark blond softness of his hair as she teased him gently. "Seduce me with your words, Shakespeare." She lay her cheek against his back when he grunted in amusement, whispered her own confession after a while. "I've been looking, too."

"We just ain't been lookin' at the same time," Daryl sighed. "You been busy with Sophia and gettin' the Inn off the ground. I been tryin' not to run the diner into the ground. Ain't nobody's fault really. Just dumb luck we finally noticed each other at the same time."

"Dumb luck? Really?" she murmured, drawing lazy patterns on his heated skin with delicate fingers. "Maybe it was something else. Fate, perhaps?"

"Milton again?"

"Shut up," she giggled helplessly, her breath warm and whimsical against his ear. "I'm being serious."

"So m'I," Daryl shrugged with a twitching smile. "You brought him into this bed with us first, Sweetheart. Can't blame a man for bein' curious, mentionin' his brother like that. So 'fess up." He reluctantly relinquished her hand, and she folded her arms beneath

her on his back, resting her chin in the cradle of them.

"Well?"

"Milton has a hypothesis."

"Go on," Daryl encouraged, the alarm clock long forgotten as the rising sun set fire to her curls, and he and Hades settled in for what he hoped was one helluva story. "Tell me more about this hypothesis."

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><p>Surprising absolutely no one, I have zilch-o willpower. Like nada.

**My block is finally fading with _YMO_, but I feel like I've spoiled you with long chapters with that one, and it's taking me longer to write said longer chapters. I'm not in the right mindset to tackle _The Wonder_, and _Ebb_ and _between_ are giant angst-balls right now, and I don't know about you guys, but that finale gave me enough of that. **

**So you have this little fic. Shae's attempt at fluff, complete with short, manageable chapters that'll hopefully get the creative juices flowing a little better. **

**It's AU, of course, and everybody's a little scrambled up (just like I like it, lol). You'll find out more about Daryl's connections to everybody, and Carol's too, as chapters move along. Like I said, chapters of this fic will probably be short and sweet and hopefully to the point. I think it'll be fun. At least I hope so. I've had visions of this fic swirling around in my head for a couple weeks now, and I've had fun with it, lol. **

**We're starting in the middle (well...I'm still debating that...we might be closer to the end here; we'll see), and future chapters will jump around somewhat. I'll do my best to keep things clear, and if I don't, by all means tell me. **

**Anyway, I'll stop rambling because I have an early morning ahead, and it's already morning. Ha. The joys of being a bit of an insomniac. **

**Feedback is love. Let me know if you're interested in reading more. **

**P.S The title's not gonna win any awards, lol, but it'll make more sense as we get deeper into the story. **

2. Chapter 2

The Breakfast Club

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><p>"Actually, I have a hypothesis about that."

_Daryl grunted and rolled his eyes. Milton had a hypothesis for everything, least it'd seemed that way to Daryl in the few weeks he'd been stuck sharing the same cramped bedroom with him, and Mullet Boy always ate it up. Well, almost always. Sometimes, they had their disagreements, and it was the closest thing to entertainment he'd found yet in this gingerbread house. He looked up from the history text book he was pretending to read, interest finally piqued, when he heard the sharp, challenging tone of Eugene's voice. _

"_But do you have any empirical data to back it up?" _

_Milton puffed up like a banty rooster ready to do battle, his beady eyes flashing indignantly as he backed his cowering cohort into a canted corner. The attic door creaking open without warning deflated him faster than a punctured helium balloon. He whirled around, rocking uneasily on the balls of his feet. "Andrea," he squeaked, sliding his glasses off of his nose and fussing with the foggy lenses. "I didn't hear you knock." _

"_That's because she didn't, Genius," Daryl muttered dryly. Looping his arm loosely around his upraised knee, he brought his thumb to his mouth and began to gnaw at a nail that was already ragged and raw, intent on ignoring the whole pathetic lot of them. They made it damned hard, though, and Daryl couldn't help spying on the little scene beneath the shaggy shield of his bangs. _

"_She did not, in fact, grace us with such a polite," Eugene gulped mid-sentence as the blonde's fierce gaze lit upon him, the rest of the words rushing out of his gaping mouth in a monotone babble when he backed down from his censure, "albeit completely _unnecessary_ gesture." _

_Daryl's lips twitched tellingly. _Porter was a pussy, a peeping pussy at that.

_Andrea's lips pursed and she tucked her arms across her middle, the action stretching the faded cotton of her tee-shirt tight across her chest. _

_Milton and Eugene released identical choked groans almost simultaneously, and Daryl already knewâ€"without specifically lookingâ€"that the pair of them were drooling over Andrea's tits again. Milton more politely, of course, and less obvious to boot. Anybody with a pair of open eyes could see it though, and at seventeen, Andrea was already what his brother Merle would call a bold, ballsy broad. The girl's eyes were even sharper than her tongue, but Daryl reckoned it was respect for old man Horvath the only thing that saved Mamet's skin, Eugene's by extension, now _and_ then. He'd seen it himself, the pair of 'em, going on three years now at school, when he actually showed up for more than homeroom and stuck around past his free lunch, and he was even more embarrassed for them now than he'd been before, especially for Milton. _Foster_ might have been just an adjective or title of sorts; hell, English weren't his favorite subject. But the word that followed it meant somethin', even if Daryl didn't like it, even if he never fully accepted it. Andrea was their sister, even if it were only by the loosest of circumstance, and his bumbling bunk-mate would best be served finding someone else to fuel his fanboy fantasies. There were

things you learned 'bout somebody sharin' a little box like this one for livin' quarters, and some of 'em Daryl wished he weren't privy to. In that way, at least, it was no different than living hand to mouth in Merle's rusty old clunker. _

"_That's right, Eugene. Why would I knock when I live here?"

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_Eugene opened his mouth, no doubt preparing it for the clumsy insertion of his size 15 foot, but Milton saved the scientific savant with a simple shake of his head as he stepped forward, his cheeks pink and his eyes shyly downcast. "Is there something we can help you with, Andrea? Some way we might offer our assistance?" _

_Andrea softened her stance and sighed, her arms falling to her side. "Irma sent me up here to tell you dinner's on the table. And before you ask, Eugene, Amy's already set you a place." _

_Eugene didn't have to be told twice, shuffling away in that awkward way of his and waxing lyrical about Ms. Irma's legendary culinary prowess in this part of Georgia. _

_Milton followed close on his heels, leaving Daryl alone with the busybody blonde, and Daryl bit back an exasperated groan when Andrea lowered her voice and spoke to him in that special, knowing tone she seemed to use only on him. _

"_Did you hear what I said, Daryl? Dinner's ready." _

_Daryl tracked her progress as she walked slowly around the room, studying the framed poster of the periodic table hanging over Milton's bed, peering with squinted eyes into the eyepiece of the microscope he'd forgotten to turn off, just generally loitering 'round and likely building up 'til she said something else she knew he wouldn't like. Andrea did that a lot, and not just to him. She was a regular pain in his ass now that they were confined to the same four walls and a roof. Maybe if he acknowledged her, she'd leave quicker, but Daryl weren't born with no lucky silver spoon in his mouth; he knew better soon as he said it. Girl had the habit of cutting through bullshit faster than the blink of an eye. "Ain't hungry." _

_Andrea stopped in front of Bia's terrarium, pity and morbid fascination warring for the upper hand as she watched the reptile slowly squeeze the life out of its own dinner. Pity finally eroded any further interest she had in observing the whole process, and she turned her back on it, approaching him carefully. "You always say that." _

_Daryl shrugged, shrinking back away from her when she joined him on the narrow twin bed, her fingers clinging to its edge. His foot bumped the history book, and it thudded against the floor in a crinkle of pages, a pencil with the faint imprint of his teeth peeking from its spine. "N'I mean it. Thought you was smarter than you look." _

_Tilting her head, her hair spilling over her strong shoulder in a golden wave, Andrea considered him seriously for a minute before a small smirk spilled free. "I don't know whether to thank you or knee you in the nuts." _

_Before he could catch himself, Daryl matched her expression with a wry twist of his own lips. "Didn't know it was that much of a choice with you. 'Sides. My nuts are off-limits." She punched a hole in his gut and his little bubble of amusement with her next teasing question. _

"_On account of us being family now?" _

_His earlier concessions aside, Daryl resisted her claim with an indignant defense of his last remaining blood kin. "Merle's the only family I got. The only one I _need_." He clenched his jaw at her needless reminder, fisting the soft blankets beneath him. The uncharacteristically gentle way she delivered it made his teeth itch.

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"_He's not here, Daryl." _

"_He's comin' back," Daryl insisted, and she looked at him the same damn way she'd looked at that fuckin' mouse in the snake's coiled grip. He snapped, shoving off of the bed and away from her, stalking toward the tiny window that looked out over a picture perfect yard in a cookie cutter neighborhood. It was a far cry from the shack he and his brother had survived in 'til drink and ignorance claimed his daddy's sorry life. It was a palace compared to Merle's Ford. It was all too good for a Dixon. That's how Daryl knew his brother was coming back. "Merle's comin' back." _

"_Maybe," Andrea conceded after a while. "Maybe so." She stood up, smoothing the wrinkles out of her shirt, and looked him straight in the eye, not faltering, not flinching one bit. "I used to be like you. I used to believe I didn't need anybody else in this world but my little sister. Turns out I was wrong. I think you are too." _

"_Shows what you know," Daryl scoffed as she turned on her heel to leave. _

_Andrea lingered at the door, a palm pressed against either side of it. "I'll fix you a plate. You know where to find it. You knowâ€¦for when you get hungry enough to sneak downstairs. You might want to wait a while, though. The old man's pulling a late shift at the diner. Wouldn't want to put you in the uncomfortable position of acting civilized." _

_Daryl dismissed her with a one-fingered salute that she took in stride. _Yeah. The girl was a right regular pain in his ass.

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><p>So. Turns out I like my fluff best with a pinch of angst added and stirred in. M'Sorry? Well, maybe not too sorry. We'll pick back up with the fluffiness soon.

**In case you hadn't caught on, this chapter occurred in Daryl's past, roughly a dozen years or so. :) I told you I'd give you background on his connection to the others, and here it is. Don't worry. Carol will be making her appearance soon. Next chapter, in fact. **

****To make it easier for you to recognize, all 'past' chapters will be in italics from now on. I think I've settled on a pattern of 3-4 past chapters for every present day chapter, then we'll catch back up with our babies in that warm bed. I figure this way we'll all get enough of sweet sexiness, lol. ****

****Hope you enjoyed this little look-see into Daryl's past. Thank you so much for the follows, the faves, the lovely comments, and just generally reading. ****

****More soon, I hope. Never underestimate the power of inspiration, lol. ****

3. Chapter 3

****The Breakfast Club****

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><p>"That's it, then? Neither of you have anything to say for yourselves?"

_Daryl's eyes flickered to Milton beside him, pale except for the fine trickle of blood on his stoic lip, his hands folded neatly in his lap and his back proud and straight. Only the rabbit thrum of his pulse at his neck betrayed his anxiety at the situation Daryl's own fists had landed them in, and the muscles in his throat worked as he gathered his courage to speak. _

"_Yes, Mr. Mamet?" Principal Monroe encouraged softly, peering through the glasses perched on the end of her nose._

_Daryl gave a slight shake of his head when Milton's eyes darted in his general direction, and he directed his gaze to the untied laces of his muddy left boot when the pint-sized administrator stood up from her desk with a flutter of pages and a resigned sigh. He shuffled his feet when her shiny red pumps entered his limited field of vision and flinched when her cool fingers reached out to sweep his sweaty bangs from his forehead, gritting his teeth painfully.

_

"_Hold still, Mr. Dixon." _

_Daryl scowled and jerked his chin from the careful cup of her palm when her curious fingers touched a particularly tender spot, and she wisely took a couple of steps back, regarded him with a patient kind of softness that bordered uncomfortably on parental. _

"_That's quite the impressive shiner you've got there," she finally remarked. "Rumor has it, Mr. Walsh has one to match _and_ a broken nose. You two wouldn't happen to know how he acquired such injuries, would you?" When Milton merely twiddled his thumbs, and Daryl remained mum, she removed her glasses and tiredly pinched the bridge of her nose, gently nodding her head. "That's what I thought. That'll be all, gentleman. Send Mr. Porter in, will you? And get checked out

by the nurse. _Both_ of you." _

_Milton didn't need to be told twice, scrambling from his seat and scurrying to the door like one of Bia's panicked prey, desperate to make an escape. _

_Daryl was slower to follow, wincing as he straightened from his slouch and levered himself to his feet. He stalled, his head hung low, when Principal Monroe delivered a few more parting words, meant for his ears only. _

"_Your show of solidarity is admirable. Your particular brand of loyaltyâ€¦well, it's increasingly rare in this day and age. _However_, Mr. Dixon. Ms. Harrison is more than capable of defending her own honor; she doesn't need you stepping into the fray and fighting her battles with your fists. Neither do your friends, nor the rest of your family for that matter. Next time, and I'm not fool enough to believe there won't be a next time, take a deep breath and let cooler heads prevail. Please," she entreated calmly. Her lips twitched with humor then, and her eyes glinted before she made a quiet confession, meeting Daryl's contemplative stare head on. "Walsh puts enough gray in my hair as it is." _

_Spurred on by her candor, Daryl ground out a gruff defense of a boy he'd come to think of in the last six months as his brother in bond, if not blood. "Miltonâ€¦he weren't no part of this. S'just in the wrong place at the wrong time." The educator's expression changed little outwardly, but that same softness from before reappeared, filling Daryl with a quiet sense of resolve. "Won't be no more trouble." _

"_I'm glad to hear it." _

_Daryl made to leave then, satisfied he'd spoken his piece, but she stopped him one more time. _

"_Be that as it may, I'm sending you both home for the rest of the day. Possibly longer," she admitted as she rounded her desk again and sank into her chair, replacing her glasses and scanning the sheet of paper in front of her that contained the name of each and every person present before, during, and after the brawl that had no doubt wrought chaos on an otherwise ordinary winter's day. "I'll make my final judgment after I interview the rest of the witnesses. Violence simply won't be tolerated in my school, Mr. Dixon. Is that understood? I expect better things from you. I know I'm not the only one." _

_Daryl could do no more than nod, shouldering through the narrow doorway of her office and passing Mullet Boy and that chubby chick with the glasses on the way out. _

_The old man didn't say nothing when they walked into the diner during the tail-end of the lunch rush. He barely looked up from the countertop he was scrubbing. Was Ms. Irma clucked her tongue at them and inspected the nurse's handiwork with her gentle mama's hands, pointed them to an empty table in the corner of the small place. The woman fussed over them 'fore Milton shooed her away himself. They sat at that table, not saying much of anything, until the rubber-necking customers gradually emptied out and Ms. Irma herself left to pick Amy and Noah, the newest member of their household, up from the grade

school. _

_Daryl looked up from the mug of cocoa he was cradling when he heard the scrape of a chair against the floor, and the old man was there, silently looking them both over as he joined them at the table. Without preamble, he launched into a spiel that had Daryl's eyes widening. Well, at least one of them. The other one hurt like a sonuvabitch and had already swollen into an unintentional squint.

_

"_That Walsh kid has always been a hothead. Like his daddy before him. What'd he say this time?" _

_Milton shrugged and picked a melting marshmallow from the froth in his own mug. "The usual. _The Brady Bunch _is a factually inaccurate slight." _

_The old man slid the fisherman's bucket hat from his head and turned it around and around in his hands like a Frisbee, the barest hint of a twinkle in his eye as he mused, "I don't know where he thinks I'm going to build that ark or find the time. I'm too short-handed at this place, and that new litter of kittens Amy found underneath the porch is cute but hardly qualifies as worthy of humanity's last gasp." _

_Daryl looked at the pair of them in disbelief. "You sayin' I busted up my knuckles for nothin'?" _

"_Not for nothing." The diner door tinkled closed behind Andrea, and she swooped across the room to join them, breathless and flushed from her sprint damn-near halfway across town. She let her purse slip from her shoulder as she claimed the seat next to Daryl as her own, and her pale eyes roved over his bruised and battered face. She glanced over at Milton and smiled. "Not for nothing, even though I'm a big girl and don't need my brothers to take up for me." _

_Color crept up Daryl's neck, and he found himself torn between embarrassment and pride at her obvious appreciation of his efforts. "Ask me, the prick had it comin'. Had no right to be callin' you that." _

"_Daryl's right," Milton declared with soft vehemence, his hands clenching into angry fists. "Somebody should have blacked his other eye." _

"_Somebody _did_," Andrea smirked, sheepishly revealing her own bloodied knuckles. "Looks like we'll both be pulling shifts here at the diner for the next week. Milton gets to go back Monday, but you and me? Rick, Eugene, and Olivia vouched for you, and Monroe was only going to give you three days because you didn't start the fight. But Shane's old man wouldn't rest 'til we all received the same punishment. I hope you like washing dishes." _

_The old man briefly covered his face, his bushy brows peeking over the top of his fingers, before pushing his chair back and standing up. "What am I going to do with all of you?" He left them then to greet the customer that'd just walked into the establishment, lightly shaking his head. _

_Daryl picked up the hat he'd cast aside, absently tracing the floppy

brim with his fingertips. His voice was little more than a murmur as he asked, concerned, "He mad?" Andrea filched his mug of cocoa, brought the lukewarm liquid to her lips and sipped, and he let her, waiting her out for an answer. Was Milton finally put him out of his drummed up misery. _

"_He's disappointed." _

_Andrea nodded in agreement, her pale eyes soft with understanding. They'd all known the worry of losing the roof over their heads, the fear of one misguided action spitting them right back into an uncaring world. She knew Daryl's just hadn't had time enough to fade. "It never lasts long. His disappointment," she clarified. Her sympathetic smile slowly morphed into one of bemusement as she looked first to him then to Milton. "Did Shane really call us a band of misfit toys?" _

_Daryl growled in remembrance. "The hell's a misfit toy?" _

_Milton joined Andrea in her fit of laughter, quietly chuckling. "You know. The island of misfit toys?" _

_Andrea knuckled the tickled tears from her eyes, wincing and smiling simultaneously when she took in his squinted glower. "C'mon. You never seen _Rudolph_, Clint Eastwood? It's a childhood rite of passage. You really _have_ been missing out. Next, you're gonna ask me who the Easter Bunny is." _

Irritated with her teasing, Daryl pushed back from the table in a huff.

"_Daryl," Andrea whined. "C'mon. You know I was just kidding."

_

_Daryl ignored her, the old man, too, as he called his name. He left them all behind as he shoved through the diner's door, barely missing a couple of old biddies in his path. He weren't so lucky as he rounded the corner, and his hands shot out and grabbed the shoulders of the person he'd plowed into. "Why don't you watch where you're goin'?" The bluster bled from his voice when he realized it was a woman he nearly knocked on her ass, just a girl really, and his hands softened their grip when a stiff February wind plucked the drab woolen cap from her head, freeing a mane of tangled curls that swirled around his exposed forearms like red satin ribbons. _

_Big, watery blue eyes lifted to his face, and a gloved hand swiped at a tear that crawled down a pink, freckled cheek. Her voice was soft, hushed as she made her apologies and bent slowly to retrieve her hat, Daryl dropping to a crouch beside her. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to just run into you like that. I guess Ed w_as_ right all along. I really _am _a clumsy mess." _

_Daryl's hand closed on the hat 'bout the same time as hers did, and he held it out in offering. "Hey. Was me the one not payin' attention." _

"_It's kind of you to say that, but you're the one at a distinct disadvantage hereâ€¦_" _

"_Daryl," Daryl blurted out as she took the hat from him with careful

gentleness. "Name's Daryl. Like I said it weren't your fault."

—

She smiled at him then, sweet and slow, her apologies effectively silenced, and she leaned into his steadying hands as she struggled to regain her feet. "Thank you, Daryl." —

"Weren't nothin'," Daryl mumbled, his fingers falling from her hips and emerging from the fluttering tails of her coat. Without thinking, they skated across the now prominent press of her belly between them, and he looked to her in wonder as a light kick followed his movements. "What the—" Her soft laugh had him glancing up sharply, searching her pretty face. "What the hell was that?" —

She snared his fleeing hand in her own and held it there, her shining blue eyes dancing as they wandered his awestruck face. — "That's not a what, Daryl. It's a who. — Sophia wants to thank you, too." —

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><p>So. There you have it. A little more backstory for you guys, and Carol's (and Sophia's) first run-in with Daryl. :)

Thanks so much for reading!

**Feedback is love. **

4. Chapter 4

The Breakfast Club

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><p>"I'll take the biggest, blackest cup of coffee you got."

With his bruised, bloodshot blue eyes, pathetic excuse for a five o'clock shadow, and limp, lifeless curls falling into his face, Grimes looked like shit on toast, but Daryl was finding it hard to muster up too much sympathy for the scrawny, bow-legged bastard. Especially when he weren't so sure Olive Oyl was worth it in the first place. But he didn't say none of that. Not many people out there was so willin' to do right by a kid that didn't ask to be born in the first place. Daryl ought to know. And people their age? It was damn near unheard of. Grimes was all right. Obviously not blessed in the brains' department, least common sense-wise, or else he'd have wrapped that shit up as Merle always used to say, but he was tryin' his best, and Daryl respected that. Picking up the coffee pot, he set it right in front of the new father, along with an empty mug. He shrugged off Grimes's expression of thanks and returned to wiping down the counter while he waited on T-Dog to get back from his break. "Time to make a new pot anyways." —

"_You don't know how much I needed this." _

_He tossed the first cup back like it was a shot of the hard stuff, and Daryl ducked his head to hide his smirk. "Think I do." _

_Grimes started to protest. "No, Man. Youâ€|shit!" _

_His sudden, loud exclamation drew the attention of just about every patron currently in the diner, and it bein' breakfast, that was a whole lot of folks staring in their direction like gutless goldfish. Daryl suppressed a groan when the old man's hawkish eyes lit and lingered on them both, his forkful of pancakes dripping syrup onto the tabletop below him, and Ms. Irma got up from the table to approach them. The little ones remained oblivious to the whole scene, while Milton only looked marginally interested, and Andreaâ€|well, Andrea was Andrea, and Daryl would have flipped her off if Ms. Irma weren't right there, makin' him feel guilty with that warm smile of hers. He already felt bad enough for turnin' down yet another invitation to the _Breakfast Club_, as Amy called it. That kid was always makin' a club of something or other; Daryl reckoned the only way she got away with that shit was on account of those big blue gumdrops that took up two thirds of her face. Milton claimed she looked like one of those _Precious Moments_ dolls. Daryl didn't know what the hell the boy was talkin' 'bout. Big surprise there.

_

"_Boys. Everything okay over here?" Ms. Irma asked, resting a hand lightly on Grimes's shoulder. _

"_Just fine," Daryl informed her gruffly. Grimes weren't so short and to the point, though; he took the offered opening and ran with it, his pasty face glowing almost as red as the stained tee-shirt he had taken to holding away from his chest like it had sprouted fangs. It dawned on Daryl what the splotch was right about the time he got a good whiff of the soured remnants of young Carl Grimes's breakfast. He couldn't help wrinkling his nose in disgust. _

"_It's all my fault, Mrs. Horvath. I didn't mean to cause a scene. It's just..." _

"_Parenthood is a messy profession." _

_Grimes seemed to take heart in her kind teasing, smiling wryly. "He peed on my other shirt, and I'm supposed to be at the pool for my shift in less than half an hour." _

"_Sucks to be you, Man," T-Dog announced upon his return, tying his apron back on and hurrying to the back to check on Jacqui in the kitchen before Ms. Irma had a chance to tsk at him for the insensitive comment. _

"_Come upstairs with me, Dear. I might be able to help you out."

_

_Daryl snorted at the hopeful look on Grimes's face but quickly fixed a blank look on his face when Ms. Irma addressed him. _

"_Daryl, do eat some breakfast." She sighed softly when he gave his requisite response. _

"_Ain't hungry." _

"_You know there's plenty if you change your mind." _

_She left it at that and led Grimes upstairs. When the pair re-emerged from the small upstairs apartment less than fifteen minutes later, the stain was barely noticeable, and Grimes looked less like one of the walking dead and more like one of the living. Nevertheless, Daryl held out a steaming Styrofoam cup in offering when the square pulled a couple of bills out of his pocket to pay.

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_Grimes accepted it with a grateful groan, taking a hearty draw. "You busy this evening, Dixon?" _

"_Watch out," T-Dog cracked as he rejoined Daryl behind the counter. His dark eyes sparkling, and his teeth gleaming white, he grinned at Grimes and arched a brow at him. "Sure your little mama'll be okay with you inviting our resident redneck out for a night on the town?"

_

_Grimes's slow answering smile and T-Dog's self-amused chortle had Daryl rolling his eyes at them both and walking away. "Know what, Man? Screw you. Screw you both." _

"_Milton can tag along as a chaperone if it makes you feel better."

_

_T-Dog guffawed, slapping Grimes on the back as he squeezed past him with his notepad and pen in hand, ready to take their newest customer's order. "Good one, Man. Didn't know you had it in you."

_

_Grimes's crazy-eyed grin faded into something more earnest, and almost against his will, Daryl found himself stalling in his tracks and muttering out, "Naw. Ain't busy. Neither's Milton." _

_Grimes gave a pleased nod. "You know where Greene's farm is?"

_

"_Got some idea," Daryl huffed. "What's this about?" Grimes didn't answer right away, and Daryl felt his already limited patience where this kind of stuff was concerned growing thin. Just because he tolerated the guy ever since he spoke up for him during that whole shitstorm with Walsh didn't mean he wanted to hold hands and sing fuckin' _Kumbaya_. "Well," he finally snapped. "You gonna say somethin'?" _

"_You'll find out when you get there. Andrea's welcome to come, too. Greene's farm. Five o'clock." _

"_Five o'clock," Daryl acknowledged. "Fine. Ain't you got somewhere to be?" _

_Five o'clock saw Daryl and Milton bumping along an old, rutted country road in the old man's borrowed Chevy. Daryl was well and ready to give up and turn around, sick of having a sharp, coiled spring poking him in the left ass cheek with every unavoidable bounce, and Milton was looking a little green around the gills as he studied the scribbled directions in his lap. Finally, the old

two-storied farmhouse loomed ahead, and Milton heaved about as big a sigh of relief as Daryl when they spotted Grimes's car in the driveway. That feeling didn't last long for Daryl when he saw the thin, reedy figure of Grimes's girl emerge from the vehicle, her long brown hair and her dress fluttering in the evening breeze and her baby son snug against her chest. He had the passing notion to turn around, but he knew it was too late. They'd already been seen. "Fuck," he swore softly. _

"_Ditto," Milton murmured, throwing his hands out to brace himself when Daryl tapped the truck's brakes a little too hard in his frustration and nearly sent him sprawling in the floor. As it was, it took several minutes of fumbling to recover his glasses from the floorboard, and he was sweating profusely with nerves and exertion when he finally joined Daryl and the rest outside of the vehicle.

_

_Before anybody had a chance to speak, they heard another car rocking and rattling up the driveway, and a young black man that couldn't have been that much older than any of them got out of the car.

_

_Daryl's eyes narrowed at the stiff white collar standing out against the black suit, the small Bible cradled in the man's hands, and he looked to Grimes in disbelief. "This what I think it is?" Grimes nodded, slowly, and Daryl swore. "This even legal?" He knew Grimes weren't of legal age, least not without a parent's permission; that's the way his vague understanding of Georgia law worked. He also knew Grimes's parents didn't approve one bit of the mess their son had landed himself in. Hell, everybody 'round town knew _that_. It weren't no secret. As for Grimes's girlâ€¦Daryl supposed if her parents cared one way or the other, well, maybe there wouldn't be that little boy working up a cry. But Daryl didn't pretend to understand the in's and out's of somebody else's family; they were all fucked up in one way or another, nobody bein' perfect and all. He swore again, low under his breath, unable to believe he'd been sucked into this whole mess. The only saving grace of the matter was Andrea's absence; Olive Oyl annoyed her merely by drawing breath.

_

_Milton, the walking encyclopedia, answered Daryl's question before Grimes or the young clergyman even had a chance to open their mouths. "Actually, as young parents themselves, they don't need their own parents' permission. It's perfectly legal, but ill-advised. Are you two really sure you want to do this?" _

_Grimes wrapped his arm around his girl's back and pulled her into his side. "Lori's it for me." _

"_I'm sure," Lori murmured against Carl's crown of thick dark hair.

_

"_So everybody's in agreement then?" The priest looked around at all of them. "There is to be a wedding here today?" _

_Grimes and his girl spoke in concert. "There is." _

"_Don't look at me," Daryl scowled. _

"_Will there be cake afterward?" Milton asked, causing Grimes and the

girl to laugh and Daryl to roll his eyes. _

"_There'll be cake," a soft voice promised. _

"_Punch, too." _

_Olive Oyl beamed and handed the squirming kid over to Grimes, rushing beyond them with her arms outstretched and her brown eyes welling with happy tears. "Carol! Patricia! I'm so glad you came."

_

_It was an eye-opening transformation, and for the briefest of seconds, Daryl saw what Grimes saw, and the scowl on his face started to melt away. Maybe this weren't such a bad thing. Least it weren't the stupidest thing he'd been involved in, being Dixon born and all. He allowed the corners of his mouth to lift in the slightest of smiles as he glanced in Grimes's direction, but that expression froze and his heart started beatin' triple time with recognition when the girl's words started to filter through the haze. _It couldn't be_. It'd been months since the first and only time he'd heard that name, heard that same sweet voice. _

"_Look at you. Sophia, you're getting so big!" _

* * *

><p>Sorry for the delay on this chapter. I know I promised it sooner, but RL happened. :)

**The law's since changed, but once upon a time, you didn't have to have your parent's permission to marry at age 16 if you were pregnant or a parent. Least that's the way I understood it. I was barely legal myself back when they made the change, lol. I exaggerate, but it's been a while. **

**I hope you enjoyed the chapter. **

**Next one is back to present day, and I don't know about you guys, but I'm feeling a little smuffy. ;) **

**Thanks so much for reading! **

**Feedback is love and has magical powers. **

**LOL! **

5. Chapter 5

The Breakfast Club

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* * *

><p>Hades bounded up the stairs ahead of him, and Daryl shook his head at the over-eager pooch. "Now, you get in a hurry? Man, C'mon."

The dog didn't waste any time once they were inside the apartment and his leash was unclipped, skittering across the floor in an excited click-clack of nails and launching himself into the middle of the unmade, _empty_ bed.

Daryl didn't let himself focus on that little detail, stalking across the room in the mutt's wake and brandishing a pointed finger at him. "No. Ab-so-fuck-in-lute-ly not. Get out of my bed, asshole."

Hades merely cocked his head in response and opened his mouth in the canine equivalent of a smug, smart-assed smirk. Then he lowered his head to his paws, burrowed deeper into the wrecked mess, and started up a drum-beat thump of his tail against the mattress.

With a resigned groan, Daryl joined the hellhound on the bed and tiredly toed his shoes off of his feet. Gathering the pillow in his arms, he tucked his nose into its softness and breathed in deep, the long forgotten but too familiar heaviness of disappointment settling in his bones, its tentacles reaching out and curling around his vital organs one by one until he felt their painful squeeze around his heart. He scowled when the dog's furred heft slumped against his side and freed up a hand to push its snuffling snout away. "S'your fault. Took you out for a piss, and what'd you do? You're worse than that dog in Sophia's movie with that squirrel shit. Took too long chasing his wily ass, and now she'sâ€|"

"You finish that sentence, I'm going to dump this entire bowl of popcorn over your head."

That damn giggle of hers snuck beneath his sorry skin and soaked into his cells like sparkling Champagne bubbles, and all that weight from seconds before effortlessly slid away as he levered himself up on his elbows to meet her teasing smile. "Thought you'dâ€|" Again, she refused to let him finish his statement, tossing a chilled bottle of water at him and hitting him square in the chest. She huffed and shook her head at him as he sat up fully, some of the curls piled high atop her head snaking free. Propping a hand against her waist, she struggled to offer up her best approximation of a scowl, and the corners of Daryl's mouth quirked slyly when she failed. With his denim chambray shirt swallowing her whole and her pink painted toes curling in her trumped up indignation, he'd never seen a sight more adorable, not that he'd ever admit something so sappy to her or anybody else really. He had a certain reputation to maintain, after all.

"I know what you thought. You should know me better than that, Daryl Dixon."

Pulling himself to the edge of the bed as she approached, Daryl muttered an apology. "M'Sorry. Won't do it again." He took the bowl of popcorn from her when she stepped into the welcoming vee of his legs, stowing it safely out of Hades's reach, and circled his arms around her legs, tipping his chin skyward as her gentle hands slid into his hair. He damn near purred as her nails scratched against his scalp, resting his forehead against her cloth-covered belly and sliding his rough palms up the backs of her thighs. She was sweet and soft, and damn if he weren't straining against the fly of his jeans again. There was no hidin' it, and he groaned as his hands molded over the smooth, sensitive curve where her thigh met her ass, and she

stumbled slightly against him, removing her hands from his hair to grip his shoulders, hard. Breathing just as hard, he rasped out another apology. "Sorry."

She took a distancing step back and looked down at him. Her blue eyes were positively dancing as she gave him a wide berth, propping herself up at the head of the bed with the abandoned pillow and placing the bowl of popcorn in the cradle of her pale legs. "What for? Sniffing my pillow like a creeper? Not having anything better to offer me for breakfast than popcorn and gummy bears? Or could it be you're sorry for finding it so hard to resist me?" Her auburn brows did a comical little wiggle, and her lips pursed, valiantly fighting back a grin as she glanced pointedly at his groin.

Her bright eyes and flushed cheeks mocked him, and eyes downcast, Daryl tugged at one painted toe before gruffly pointing out the obvious with a shrug of his bare shoulders. "Weren't expectin' no company. Hell, weren't expectin' you to kiss me back. Those are just snacks I keep up here for the kids." He traced a fingertip across the top of her foot and swirled it across her ankle bone, bringing his thumb into the mix and sweeping it across the faint collection of freckles he discovered there. She shivered lightly at his gentle touch, and he wanted to smile as he watched her tug that bruised lip of hers between her teeth. Scooting closer to her on the bed, he resumed stroking his fingertips across her pale skin and dug his other hand into the bowl of buttery kernels, missing the way her blue eyes darkened when his tongue swiped across his fingers to clean up the greasy mess.

"So you're telling me you're the reason behind Lori's latest breakdown?"

Daryl snorted, remembering the way Olive Oyl had screeched like a banshee at her sugar-hyped son's latest stunt, and smirked. "Can't take all the credit. I just loaded the gun. Rest was Carl."

She just bit her lip harder and shook her head at his choice of words, trying desperately not to smile. Of course he wasn't interested in taking the blame, only the credit when it came to aiding and abetting in the torture of their mutual friend at the hands of her own mischievous child. And she knew Daryl. He could hem and haw until the cows came home, but the truth of the matter was, the man counted Lori a friend, had for a while now. If he didn't, well, he would have said so. At heart, he was unflinchingly honest. "She's pregnant, Daryl. Play nice."

"There gonna be consequences if I don't?" His pinky finger dipped behind her knee and dragged deliberate circles across her skin. He tossed another piece of popcorn into his mouth and raised his brows at her in challenge. He snatched the bag of gummy bears from her unsteady hands when she rolled her eyes and attempted to ignore him. "Answer me, Woman," he pressed, absently continuing to map out the faint freckles that dusted almost every square inch of her pale skin. Tearing into the candy with his teeth, he shook a few loose into the bowl of popcorn and lifted his gaze back to her face when an involuntary shiver made her tremble beneath his hand. Daryl didn't know whether it was her responsiveness to his touch or the stormy hue of those fuckin' hungry eyes of hers staring right at him that made him do what he did next. He kept a handle on himself long enough to make sure the popcorn didn't spill all over the sheets and slid his

hands up her shaking legs, giving a rough tug and tumbling her to her back, the curls of her hair a scarlet slash against the snowy pillow. The action sent Hades scurrying for some far corner of the tiny apartment that didn't exist, but Daryl didn't really give a damn. From the looks of it, she didn't neither. "You gonna do somethin' about it? Huh?"

"Maybe," she smarted back, her smile finally breaking free, giddy and girlish in spite of the wicked twinkle her eyes held. Her chest heaved, and her belly fluttered as his fingers snagged at the front of the shirt she wore, sneaking inside the gaps between buttons to touch her heated skin. "Only if you want me to," she promised.

"I want you," Daryl grit out in a rare display of vulnerability, removing his hands and sweeping them down her sleek shape to start working buttons free. "Just you. That all right, Sweetheart?"

She acknowledged his words with a sharp intake of breath and fisted the rumpled sheets at her sides, bracing herself for his touch with a nod of assent.

Daryl growled when the little cotton triangle between her legs was revealed and brushed his knuckles back and forth across the pink and gray heart design. "Don't know why you had to put this shit back on." He hooked his finger beneath the thin gray strap of the panties and pulled it away from her hip, ducking his head to press an open-mouthed kiss there. He grunted when she squirmed beneath him and lifted his head, laying his cheek against her smooth belly. The fingers of his right hand fumbled for the bowl and came back with a rainbow handful. "Could've just fed you breakfast in bed," he smirked, dropping all of the gummies but one onto the soft mattress.

She giggled when he started walking one of the gummy bears across her belly, dipped it and his tongue into the well of her belly button. A little green replica soon joined its friend, and she squealed slightly when the scruff of his chin then his teeth scratched against the tender skin. "Why do I have Steven Tyler's voice in my head all of a sudden?" She bit her lip, moaning and arching her back a little, when Daryl retaliated for that comment with a sucking kiss there. "I know. I know. You think it's aâ€¦"

"Piece of shit movie," Daryl grumbled, sliding his hands beneath the soft swells of her ass and shifting lower on the bed. "Piece of sentimental shit song. Think this one time I'll have to agree with Merle."

She wanted to groan at the mention of his brother, especially in this bed with them, but the hard bone of his chin was rubbing against her, right there, and her legs shook with the effort not to move her hips. Judging by the gleam in his eyes and the hint of a smirk ghosting his lips, he knew it and was eating it up, so to speak. She gasped when she felt the small fingers of each of his hands breach the cotton barrier of her underwear and tickle across her skin, edging closer and closer to the part of her that wept for wanting him. "We can all guessâ€¦God." Her eyes fluttered shut as his touch grew more deliberate, and the hard jut of his chin was replaced with his nuzzling nose. "Everybody knows what Merle's favorite Aerosmith song is. God, Daryl. Daryl." Her fingers clenched in his hair as he kissed her, first with just his lips, then with the press of his

tongue, through the dampened cotton. "Don'tâ€|let's not talk aboutâ€|let's not talkâ€|at all, Daryl," she keened.

Daryl took her words to heart, and they didn't talk. _Not for a long time. _

* * *

><p>So. I promised this chapter would be smuffy even though it is so far from my strong suit. I hope you weren't disappointed. ;)

**Thanks for the comments on the last chapter. **

**Feedback is love! **

**P.S. Daryl didn't actually load a gun for Carl, in case you took that literally, lol. Just thought I should clarify that. **

End
file.